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## Did Pakistani Gov't Know Where Osama bin Laden Was Hiding?

"The idea that bin Laden got from Tora Bora to that house over the last seven or eight years without a single element of the Pakistani state knowing about it just doesn't ring true," said Pakistani journalist Mosharraf Zaidi, who has been reporting in Abbottabad. "What rings even more hollow is the notion that somehow U.S. military choppers and gunships could fly into Pakistan undetected." Pakistani writer Tariq Ali questions how bin Laden could have been living inside a fortified compound within a mile of Pakistan's premier military academy. [includes rush transcript]

### TRANSCRIPT

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**AMY GOODMAN:** We're going right now to Islamabad to the journalist Mosharraf Zaidi, who was tweeting yesterday early, before all this news came out, asking questions like why was a U.S. helicopter down. We're hoping that we have him on the line. Mohammed — ah, it looks like we just lost him. We'll try to get him in a minute.

Tariq Ali is with us in Britain. Tariq, your response to what has taken place?

**TARIQ ALI:** Amy, what is quite astonishing is that it took them such a long time. The news is that he was in a safe house which is literally next door to the Kakul military academy, one of the most heavily protected areas in the country. And the notion that this was a secret from Pakistan's military intelligence is risible. It's just not believable. I think the fact that he was there, the fact that they knew he was there — so the question that is intriguing me is how this information was got. I don't take at face value — you know, I take at face value what they're saying, that it was a courier they had been tracking. I don't believe that. I think that the information came from within Pakistan's military intelligence. And what was the pressure put to get it from them? I think the Pakistanis were informed that this was going to happen. The Pakistan's leadership was already, with [inaudible], celebrating the event — the Prime Minister Zardari, Karzai in Kabul. So, I think they had been planning it. The timing is a mystery, why they did it exactly at this moment, given that they've known that he was there. So, that's my first reaction.

The second reaction is, of course, as Jeremy has also said, that it's far better when these things are done legally, because to show that state terrorism is more powerful than individual terrorism is bizarre. I mean, everyone knows that the United States is more powerful than virtually the rest of the world put together, so we don't need a demonstration of that. What we needed, which Obama didn't talk about, was: why wasn't he captured alive — they could have done that if they knew where he was; the Pakistanis could have been told to do that — and tried in a court of law? That would have been genuinely educative and revelatory. To try him, to prove him guilty, and then to imprison him, or whatever.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Tariq Ali, we have just —

**TARIQ ALI:** But they didn't go down that route.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Tariq, we've just gotten Mosharraf Zaidi on, and I want to make sure —

**TARIQ ALI:** OK.

**AMY GOODMAN:** — we get him in from Islamabad. Mosharraf, you were early on tweeting that a U.S. helicopter had gone down yesterday. This is before we knew anything about Osama bin Laden being dead. What is the latest you understand, especially of Pakistani involvement in the killing of Osama bin Laden? And what is the reaction today in Islamabad?

**MOSHARRAF ZAIDI:** Thanks, Amy. I'm actually driving from Abbottabad to Islamabad right now, after having spent the better part of a day there. The helicopter fell — apparently fell on a — during the operation, on the compound. There's a little plot of land on which bin Laden was living, that was —

There's been a kind of a — we got an implicit denial by the Pakistani government in its official statement about, you know, Pakistan being intricately involved in this. But the notion of there not having been any involvement by Pakistan in this, it doesn't — it rings nonsensical and a little bit far-fetched. The city, Abbottabad, is — it's a garrison town that was founded by a British major in 1853. It's kind of a hill station. A lot of people enjoy the weather there during the summers, and so people have sort of a dual residence. Abbottabad itself is the largest urban area between the Punjab province, which is the largest province in Pakistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, which is a province — it's the Pashtun province. It's the province in which so much of the insecurity that's been happening in Pakistan is sourced. The specific neighborhood is a reasonably sort of middle-class, upper-middle-class neighborhood. The house is said to have been electronically sensed and well guarded.

The idea that bin Laden got from Tora Bora to that house over the last seven or eight years without a single element of the Pakistani state knowing about it just doesn't ring true. What rings even more hollow is the notion that somehow U.S. military choppers and gunships could fly into Pakistan undetected, [inaudible] and hover above the house, have one of the choppers crash, have perhaps another chopper end up there, kill bin Laden, take a few people there, capture them, and fly them away — and all of this could happen without any coordination, any kind of approval or any kind of data or information sharing with the Pakistani security establishment or the Pakistani state. It just sounds like [inaudible] a flight of somebody's fancy.

**AMY GOODMAN:** And the plane that went down yesterday, the helicopter, the U.S. helicopter, though they said no one died in that crash?

**MOSHARRAF ZAIDI:** That's right. We heard that there were no casualties. Nobody — as far as I know, nobody has actually seen the wreckage so far. People did hear a massive blast. And there are reports locally and internationally there that a helicopter had fallen there. Originally, we were told that that helicopter was a Pakistani helicopter. Today, it's — the line has been that they were both U.S. helicopters. Sources in Pakistan that are reasonably trustworthy confirmed that they're U.S. helicopters. Some people say two, others say four. But the compound itself, the location where this happened, and the fact that a helicopter went down, again — allegedly a helicopter went down — suggests that, you know, this was a Pentagon operation that wouldn't have been possible without the support of parts of the Pakistani state.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Jeremy Scahill?

**JEREMY SCAHILL:** Also, on the issue of the helicopter, I mean, we understand that it was what's called a Little Bird helicopter, which is a very lightweight helicopter that Blackwater types and JSOC types have often used in Iraq and, to an extent, in Afghanistan. The reports are that it was then destroyed by the U.S. forces after it went down. And the official line is that it was a mechanical failure. There are other reports that say that it was brought down by some kind of arms fire from within the compound, and we probably won't know that. I would concur with what Mosharraf is saying. I mean, the idea that U.S. Special Ops forces are operating in Pakistan without the knowledge of the Pakistani government is, in fact, ludicrous. And that's why, when this deal was originally brokered by Musharraf and McChrystal, the public posture had to be that the Pakistanis would deny it.

Let's remember, too, that this killing of Osama bin Laden takes place just months after Raymond Davis, who was a man who straddled the world of both the CIA and Special Operations forces, killed two men in Lahore, Pakistan, and then, after weeks of controversy, was eventually taken out of the country after payments were made to the families of his victims. One of the things that Raymond Davis is suspected of having done inside of Pakistan was having communications with people in the tribal areas, but also potentially targeting Lashkar-e-Taiba, which is a terrorist organization behind the Mumbai bombings that has been designated by the U.S. as a state sponsor of terrorism and that the U.S. accuses of having very close ties to the ISI. So, the timing of this operation coming as soon as it did after this epic scandal with Raymond Davis, perhaps the most serious crisis between Pakistan and U.S. governments in a decade, or maybe even since the ransacking of the U.S. embassy in Islamabad in 1979, is curious, to say the least.

But I think there's two questions here. Were the Pakistanis giving sanctuary to Osama bin Laden in this town that Mosharraf has just described, a heavily populated town with big military presence? And what was the full role of the Pakistani government in ultimately killing Osama bin Laden? Because it was Special Ops forces and not the CIA, it would indicate that there had to have been very high-level discussions between the U.S. and Pakistan about this, but the Obama administration says no intelligence was shared with any government, including the Pakistani. So this mystery, I think, is going to continue to deepen.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Mosharraf, has — on the ground, the response in Pakistan?

**MOSHARRAF ZAIDI:** Amy, the response here is, at least to the people that I spoke to — and I had the chance to speak to a couple of sort of, you know, bloggers, IT professionals, a few students who are studying to be software engineers, and then a few ordinary folk that were just walking around the neighborhood where this happened, who were either from the neighborhood or work in that neighborhood. I think the one word that I would use to describe the sentiment was "bewilderment." I mean, there was less sort of substantive, you know, content than reaction. It was more that — you know, the sense of bewilderment that — how could this happen? How could bin Laden have been living in our neighborhood, so close to us for all this time? And then, how could this — you know, this sort of quite grand operation, and ostensibly successful operation, had taken place? People feel as though they're starstruck by the fact that the eyes and ears of the world are now very intently focused on the city of Abbottabad.